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An opposing view

FBI is ill-equipped to catch Soviet spies

ARLINGTON, Va. — The discovery of a classic Soviet KGB "honeytrap" operation, which snared a veteran FBI agent, calls attention to the alarming extent of Soviet espionage in this country.

It indicates that the FBI is not staffed or properly equipped to cope with the flood of Soviet intelligence officers, and spies from Soviet client states, pouring into the USA.

Their target is American high technology, especially in weapons and communications. The Soviets badly want to know our military secrets and to copy them cheaply.

Yet we no longer have the capability to track these spies. Ten years ago, about 2,400 suspected hostile intelligence penetrations were under investigation by the FBI. Now, that figure is probably less than 25, while the number of Soviet agents here has increased.

There has been an almost deliberate relaxation of our protective efforts. After new guidelines for the CIA were established during the Carter-Mondale administration, its ability to conduct covert activities overseas and to discover enemy plans was diminished.

Worse yet, the FBI was restricted from investigating the tips it did get. It could no longer conduct investigations on a speculative basis, which is essential in counterespionage. It had to have evidence in advance, as if it were going after an ordinary drug dealer instead of an enemy spy.

As a result, the FBI's ability to track suspected spies, to put out nets, to tap phones, was

Ray Cline, former CIA deputy director for intelligence and professor at Georgetown University, gave his views in an interview.

shackled — and it no longer had the staff to do these things effectively in any case.

This prolonged bashing of the FBI and CIA has had a chilling effect on their operations — lowering the numbers, the capabilities, and the morale of the people we depend upon to collect intelligence on enemy intelligence services.

The restrictions on FBI and CIA activities were imposed to protect civil liberties. Instead, they protected foreigners trying to break our laws.

The civil liberties of law-abiding American citizens were not endangered then, nor would they be now. We must restore the capability of the FBI and CIA to do their jobs. The Reagan administration has made real improvements, but their efforts are still grossly inadequate to deal with the increased Soviet challenge.

Effective counterintelligence requires a long lead time. It's not like taking pictures from satellite cameras. This country is keen on technology, yet we forget we need human beings to find out the secrets and unravel the plans of other human beings.

Soviet espionage is real. It is serious. It is expanding. The FBI and CIA need more money, more people, more realistic instructions, and fewer restrictions — if we expect them to protect us.